

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

September 2002

Domestic Affairs

September 2: Before a gathering of 5 329 new teachers at Karl Marx theater in Havana, Fidel Castro admitted that the fall of communism and years of economic crisis had badly hit the island. Teachers have moved to other jobs due to low salaries, crowded classrooms and crumbling infrastructure. Castro said education "is always one of the fundamental objectives of our epic struggle for a society truly just, free and humane". The 746 schools for Havana's two million residents were repaired, painted and in certain cases expanded to allow for classes of a maximum of 20 children, "an end often desired but rarely achieved, even in developed countries," Castro said. (AFP, 3/9/02)

September 2: Cubans will begin nominating candidates for delegates in over 14,935 districts throughout the country. (Prensa Latina, 3/9/02)

September 3: At a conference in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Madrid, Spain, Havana vicar-general, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes García-Menocal, wondered about the reason for the change of heart in Cuban society that has moved from professing a "militant atheism" during the early years of Fidel Castro's regime to 86% of the population calling themselves believers, according to sociological research dated between 1994 and 1996. The Vicar-General attributed the change to the "ever-joking and casual spirit" which in his opinion "is inherent to most Cubans" characterized by a "disregard for existence and indifference to what is serious and what is not, from which religious, cultural and political inconsistencies arise". (Europa Press, 3/9/02)

September 5: The National Program for the Reduction and Elimination of the Chemicals that Pollute the Ozone Layer is advancing in Cuba, according to the government agency dedicated to that job. OTOZ (National Ozone Technical Office), informed that important advances were made in the upgrading of the INPUD plant in Villa Clara, where domestic refrigerators are manufactured, and also in the eradication of the production of gases that pollute the atmosphere, according to Nelson Espinosa, Director General of the OTOZ. (AIN, 5/9/02)

September 7: After a 21-year hiatus of demographic data collection, Cuba initiated a census of population and housing. More than 100 thousand people are taking part in this Census which the Cuban government deems critical for "improving" economic and social programs of the revolution. (EFE, Notimex, 8/9/02)

September 8: During the celebrations on the day of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (Virgin of the Charity), the patron saint of Cuba, Havana Archbishop, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, gave a homily at the end of a procession along the streets of old Havana. Ortega was concerned about the lack of positive values in Cuban society. According to the Cuban prelate, "it is evident that schools should instil these values in the new generations, but we realize that what we consider values are in crisis in our society". Ortega also criticized "counter-values that impose their falsehood" and the lack of values like "truthfulness and sincerity when nobody says what he or she really thinks or feels". (AFP, 8/9/02)

September 12: Preliminary results of a census being conducted in Cuba show that the City of Havana, with two million inhabitants, has a high population density coupled with a "floating" population, said official sources. "People coming and going, and people constantly moving within its boundaries are two particular characteristics, demographically speaking, of the City of Havana", said the Director for the campaign in the region, Maria Magdalena Hernandez.

Authorities also said a preliminary census conducted between last January and March revealed there are 2,198,269 permanent residents in the city. (World Data Service, 12/9/02)

September 12: The first Cuban live online television project is now on the web. Internet surfers around the world will be able to access television programs from the island. Cubaweb-Television, as the project is known, currently has six channels: one general interest and 5 specialized, including drama, culture, history, sports and tourism. (Notimex, 12/9/02)

September 16: Fidel Castro officially inaugurated the 2002-2003 school year with a speech at Revolution Square in Havana. Castro said that Cuba is carrying out a "profound and unprecedented educational revolution". (World Data Service, 16/9/02)

September 17: Cuba broadcast an alert due to the increase of *Aedes Aegyptis* mosquito breeding grounds. The mosquito is the transmitting agent of dengue fever. The warning was made to institutions, mass organizations, and the general population, particularly from Havana, by the National Health Promotion and Education Center, and was broadcast in the local press. (Prensa Latina, 17/9/02)

September 20: Hurricane Isidore crashed into Cuba's western provinces and stalled there, reportedly destroying 1,573 buildings and inflicting other serious damage on the agricultural region. The full extent of the damage was not clear, but radio transmissions spoke of severe inland flooding and power blackouts in the tobacco-producing province of Pinar del Río. More than a quarter-million people were evacuated from the area, most to private homes but about 4,000 to state-run shelters. (The Miami Herald, Prensa Latina, 21/23/9/02)

September 21: During a visit to affected areas in Pinar del Rio in the wake of a Hurricane that hit the province, Fidel Castro told local press that the damages "are more than expected". Pinar del Rio produces a considerable amount of the tobacco that Cuba exports – one of Cuba's main economic activities. "Once it's over", said Castro, "the real damages caused by Isidore can be tallied", referring to it as "an ill-timed but bearable blow". (EFE, 21/9/02)

September 25: Two proposals to modify the Family Code in Cuba, related to custody and parental authority, are being analyzed at a meeting of specialists in Havana. During the XII International Conference on the Rights of Family it was noted that the two proposals are in line with the UN Convention on Children, to which Cuba is a signatory. One of them is linked to the possibility of listening to the child when resolving the custody issue if there is a conflict between the parents. The other one is related to the regulation of the relationship of the child with the family of the one who loses the parental authority. (Prensa Latina, 25/9/02)

September 25: Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro were nominated as candidates to the Parliament, by the National Council of Cuban Workers (CTC), Granma daily published. It was also reported that Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino and Antonio Guerrero, imprisoned in the US, for threatening that country's national security were also selected. (Prensa Latina, 25/9/02)

Economy

September 1: Despite heavy domestic criticism and ongoing controversy, the first shipment of Venezuelan crude oil to Cuba under preferential financial terms will depart this week for the Caribbean island, two top Venezuelan government officials told the press. "This week, the first shipment will go," the president of state-owned oil monopoly Petr6leos de Venezuela SA (E.PVZ) Al6 Rodrigo told the press in Rio de Janeiro, during the World Petroleum Congress that is taking place in that city. Rodrigo added that he couldn't tell whether PDVSA would quickly reach the average of 53,000 barrels a day as agreed upon in the bilateral deal signed in October

2000 between President Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro. "Probably not, but eventually we'll reach the target of 53,000 barrels," he said. Venezuela's Oil Minister Rafael Ramírez confirmed that the first shipment indeed will take place this week. "Yes, we will resume our shipments in the next couple of days," he said. (Dow Jones Newswires, 2/9/02)

September 2: All of Cuba's energy needs will be met by the island nation's domestic petroleum production by the beginning of next year, Vice President Carlos Lage has announced. Lage said recent investments in the sector would allow Cuba to meet its goal of being self sufficient in energy. The vice president highlighted the modernization of the Antonio Guiteras Thermo-electrical Plant, which has undergone a \$45 million overhaul, as making the goal possible. Located 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of the capital Havana, the plant is currently undergoing tests and dry-runs and is expected to begin operations next month. (EFE, 3/9/02)

September 2: Signs that the Cuban economy did not perform well in the first half of the year indicate that growth will not reach the three percent rate forecast for this year. An economist who spoke to IPS on condition of anonymity said the signs that the economic crisis was once again taking a turn for the worse began to be seen last year, and that the problems were heightened by the impact on tourism of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and the drop in remittances sent home by Cubans abroad. The situation was further compounded by the estimated 1,8 billion in losses caused by hurricane Michelle in November. (IPS, 2/9/02)

September 4: Canadian company Northern Orion Explorations Ltd ("Northern Orion") has announced that it has entered into an agreement with Newport Exploration Ltd. ("Newport") whereby Newport can acquire an undivided 50% interest in the Mantua Copper Project in Cuba from Northern Orion. The acquisition will be by way of an option agreement over 100% of the issued and outstanding common shares in Minera Mantua Inc. ("Mantua"), a wholly owned subsidiary of Northern Orion. Geominera S.A., a Cuban company controlled by the government of Cuba, holds the remaining 50% of the project. (CNW, 4/9/02)

September 6: Fidel Castro warned that the island could face new economic hardships if the United States carries out what he calls "a craziness like attacking Iraq". Castro said that in the event of an increase in oil prices, his government would take measures to ensure health, education and electricity services for the population. (Notimex, 6/9/02)

September 7: Cuba Petróleo (Cupet) paid Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA the first of six installments for debt racked up under a crude oil trade agreement between the two countries, a PDVSA spokesperson told BNamericas. Venezuela has received approximately \$29 million of its \$142 million oil debt from Cuba. The repayment plan negotiated between PDVSA and Cupet consists of six monthly installments beginning September and concluding in March, PDVSA's Omar Guaregua confirmed, explaining that the first installment "was a precondition of resuming shipments to Cuba." (Business News America, Rig Zone, 10/9/02)

September 7: President Hugo Chávez said Venezuela will relaunch deliveries of oil to Cuba, suspended since April after the 47-hour coup that temporarily removed him from power. "I am pleased to announce that tomorrow the first tanker carrying oil for Cuba leaves," Chávez said in a meeting with workers, noting that the commodity would no longer be delivered at cut prices. The oil "is not free," Chávez said, speaking to his critics, goading them to come and "handcuff" him to take him to court if they wanted, in reference to threats of court action against him due to his accords with Cuba. (AFX European Focus, 8/9/02)

September 11: While acknowledging that the last 18 months have been difficult for the tourism industry, Cuban Tourism Minister Ibrahim Ferradaz was optimistic for the coming year at the opening of the 12th Pan American Hotel, Gastronomy and Tourism Schools Conference (CONPEHT2002). Ferradaz pointed out that on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the

New York World Trade Center, there is still anxiety for tourist flow to return to normal. "However, the minister said that adverse times are better teachers than bountiful cycles", and "we are optimistic". (Prensa Latina, 11/9/02)

September 13: Cuba is seeking financial investments to boost cattle-raising on the island. According to a high-ranking officer from the Ministry of Agriculture, the government is open to "all kinds of businesses" in that sector. An article published in a recent weekly edition of Granma International points out that more than \$20 million are needed to strengthen the Cuban infrastructure as well as to improve grazing areas and increase hay production. (EFE, 13/9/02)

September 16: Fidel Castro said at least 90,000 former sugar workers will return to school to be trained for new jobs amid a vast restructuring of the island nation's sugar industry. Speaking during an assembly marking the start of the school year, Castro said the workers would receive "a decent salary" during their schooling. Castro provided no specifics, but Sugar Ministry officials have said the former workers would receive between 300 and 1 000 Cuban pesos a month during their training. At the current exchange rate, that figures out to between \$11 and \$38 dollars a month, but is still higher than the average government salary of less than 300 pesos. (AP, 16/9/02)

September 18: Twenty-three months after the Integral Agreement between Cuba and Venezuela was signed, the accord between Petróleos de Venezuela (Venezuelan Oil Company) and CUPET (Cuban counterpart) demonstrates that the Cuban company has been late in making 70% of its total payments. This and other inadequacies support the plea of a Venezuelan civil society organization, Gente del Petróleo, to revise the provisions of the agreement to reduce the risks for PDVSA. (El Universal, 18/9/02)

September 19: The Cuban Oil Company (CUPET) demanded compensation from Venezuela due to the interruption of oil imports from that country since last April 11. The island still owes Venezuela some \$155 million, including default interest of \$11 million. (El Nacional, 19/9/02)

September 21: Cuba has fallen chronically behind on repaying its estimated \$100 million worth of debts in Panama, with a Cuban government bank even "bouncing" \$6 million in payments due in one recent week, Panamanian businessmen say. Some merchants have stopped extending new credit to the island, and others have traveled to Havana in hopes of persuading the government to make more timely payments, the businessmen added. (The Miami Herald, 21/9/02)

September 23: Attended by over two hundred Chinese entrepreneurs, a two-day seminar on investments in Cuba opened in the northwestern city of Dalian, China. At the inauguration ceremony, Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Minister Marta Lomas gave a detailed explanation of the current situation and potential for investment on the Caribbean Island. After the overview presentation, papers on two key sectors of the Cuban economy: the Iron and Steel Industry and Biotechnology were presented. (Prensa Latina, 23/9/02)

September 25: It is reported that WestJet Airlines Ltd. is opening another front in its offensive against Air Canada by launching charter flights to sunshine destinations this winter out of Southern Ontario. The flights to Cuba and the Dominican Republic are being offered in conjunction with tour operator Signature Vacations Inc., which is responsible for marketing and for booking tickets. (The Toronto Globe and Mail, 25/9/02)

Exile Community

September 17: The recent US House vote to lift the travel ban on Cuba and talk of further easing the trade embargo on Cuba is drawing Cuban exiles to Washington for two days. People on both

sides of the embargo issue plan to lobby Congress. A "National Summit on Cuba," described by organizers as a "pro-democracy" event, will be held at the National Press Club in Washington. The group Americans For A Free Cuba is spearheading the event, along with the Cuban-American National Foundation and the Center For A Free Cuba, as well as numerous other anti-Castro Cuban exile groups. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (CNSNews 17/9/02)

September 22: Czech President Vaclav Havel received the title of Heroes of the Liberty from representatives of the Cuban community in exile in Miami. Thanking them for the prize, Havel assured the Cuban community about his and his fellow citizens' solidarity with struggle for human rights and respect for human dignity in Cuba. Havel visited Miami at the end of his 13th and last trip to the USA in the capacity of president. (BBC News, 23/9/02)

Foreign Affairs

September 1: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called upon small island nations to renew their unity and once again "proclaim our right to life and development." Pérez Roque heads his country's delegation at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. He said there is great danger for the countries' cultural identity, heritage, economic and social development, and independence. (Prensa Latina, 2/9/02)

September 1: The Mexican ruling National Action Party (PAN) announced it wants to speak with Cuban dissidents during a meeting scheduled between the two governments in Havana in September. PAN legislator Tarcisio Navarrete, who serves on the Chamber of Deputies Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters the party has already begun its efforts to schedule a meeting with the island's opposition. "In a mature democracy like Mexico's, both parts should be heard. The PAN members were once dissidents, the opposition, and were very limited. That's why I think we should be flexible; it's not an issue of pitting the Cuban government against some of its people, but rather a way of uniting them," he said. (EFE, 3/9/02)

September 2: During the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, Cuba established diplomatic relations with the governments of the Republic of Kiribati and of the Cook Islands respectively. (Juventud Rebelde, 3/9/02)

September 2: Wei Jianxing, a standing Committee member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC), met in Beijing with Yadira García Vera, a member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party. Wei said the CPC and the Chinese people very much treasure their traditional friendship with Cuba. (Xinhua, 2/9/02)

September 3: Mexican security forces have apprehended seven Cubans who were attempting to enter the country illegally after a clandestine voyage across the Caribbean from their homeland, officials said. A Mexican Navy vessel found five of the Cubans in waters off the southeastern state of Quintana Roo aboard a small boat. They had set off from the Cuban port town of La Coloma. The other two were detained on land in the same area, naval authorities in Isla Mujeres said. Cubans seeking to escape their homeland are increasingly making the dangerous trip to Mexico aboard small crafts and Mexican officials fear the exodus could strain diplomatic ties with Cuba. (EFE, 3/9/02)

September 3: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque blamed "the powerful of the world" for creating the wide gap that separates industrialized nations from developing countries. "The economic and political order imposed on the world by the powerful is not only profoundly unfair, it is unsustainable," the Cuban official said during his speech to the World Summit on Sustainable Development that is taking place in this South African city. (EFE, 3/9/02)

September 3: A brigade of 16 Cuban teachers will assist with the development of the Grenadian education system as a symbol of the good relations between the two countries, said an official document. The T.A. Marryshow Community will benefit from Cuban instructors who will teach carpentry, horticulture, plumbing, and auto mechanics. At the same time, two secondary schools will receive Spanish teachers. (Prensa Latina, 3/9/02)

September 4: Mexican President Vicente Fox said that after the diplomatic incident of last April between himself and Fidel Castro, relations with the island are fine. (Uno Más Uno, 6/9/02)

September 5: Mexico's Ambassador to Cuba, Ricardo Pascoe, is under investigation for alleged irregularities in the administration of the Mexican diplomatic offices in Havana. The announcement was made by the Chief Administrative Officer of Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mauricio Toussaint, who explained the enquiry is being conducted by the Comptroller's Office – the administrative watchdog of the state – for alleged financial mismanagement. (El Nuevo Herald, 8/9/02)

September 5: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, left for Maputo for a brief official visit during which he plans to meet the President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano. (Granma, 5/9/02)

September 6: An exhibition of Qatar, "Crafts and Tradition", was opened in Havana. (Prensa Latina, 6/9/02)

September 7: The Cuban government announced the official program of a cultural event to celebrate the 192nd Anniversary of Mexico's independence. (Notimex, 7/9/02)

September 7: For the first time in more than four years, Mexico repatriated a group of Cuban rafters who had reached some islets in the state of Quintana Roo, according to news published in the Cuban official paper Granma. (Uno Más Uno, 8/9/02)

September 7: Mexico removed its Consul in Cuba and another member of the Consular staff in November for their participation in a network selling visas, said the Mexican Ambassador Ricardo Pascoe. Pascoe reported the case to the media in order to clear up recent statements from the Mexican Foreign Ministry suggesting that he might be involved in financial mismanagement of funds in the Embassy. "There are obvious political intentions behind this new audit (...) it is a political reprisal", he said in a press conference he called in response to attacks on his honesty. (Reuters, 7/9/02)

September 8: In reply to the concern raised by the Mexican Foreign Minister, Jorge Castañeda, on mismanagement of funds in the Mexican Embassy in Havana, the Head of Secodam, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, said the audits conducted in the Embassy did not find any serious problems. (Uno Más Uno, 8/9/02)

September 8: Guatemalan Foreign Vice-Minister, Ramiro Ordóñez Jonama, and the Cuban Ambassador to that country, Angel Lorenzo Abascal, signed an agreement regarding penal sentences on behalf of their respective countries. This agreement will permit that Guatemalan or Cuban citizens imprisoned under sentences passed by either country's courts can serve their sentences in their country of origin. (La Jornada, 8/9/02)

September 9: The Cuban government places a "paramount importance" to Cuba's attendance to the International Book Fair of Guadalajara (FIL), said the Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto. "We appreciate this opportunity in all its magnitude, in all its significance, and we think it is a great occasion to approach the Mexican people and to reinforce the cultural relations that no particular circumstances have ever been able to weaken". (La Jornada, 10/9/02)

September 9: A delegation of Mexican artists and promoters, led by the Oaxacan painter Sergio Hernández will celebrate the Cry for Independence with the opening of two exhibitions at the Casa Benito Juárez of Havana. The objective is "to reinforce historical, artistic and cultural ties between both countries during critical moments when it would appear that storm clouds have gathered in the horizon", points out Claudia Gómez Haro. The project has been under preparations for months, but the prohibition by the Secretary of Foreign Relations on celebrating the national holiday in the Cuban capital confers greater relevance upon this authentication of a relationship that has lasted two centuries. (La Jornada, 9/9/02)

September 10: The Mexican Foreign Department's operations manager, Mauricio Toussaint, accused Mexican Ambassador to Cuba Ricardo Pascoe of about \$86,000 in financial irregularities. Pascoe "is not a big fish, but he is a little, Caribbean-colored fish," Toussaint quipped during a news conference. Most of the complaints - such as the "duplicated payments"- appeared to be practices that are common among foreign offices in Cuba. Many companies pay employees a small amount to supplement by \$20 to \$40 a month by which they might earn from the state employment bureau, which provides all workers to foreign companies and embassies. Toussaint accused Pascoe of "little discipline" and said he "had put the honor of the foreign ministry in doubt." He complained that Pascoe had several times traveled out of Cuba without permission from Mexico City, said he had bought goods on the black market - a common practice in scarcity-plagued Cuba - and said he had shifted \$2, 000 from office accounts to his entertainment budget. (AP, 11/9/02)

September 10: The European Union (EU) and Cuba will hold their second political dialogue in early October in Copenhagen, said official sources of the EU presidency – currently held by Denmark. The Danish presidency is planning to hold a meeting among high-ranking officials; however, the date and participants have yet to be confirmed, added the source. (AFP, 10/9/02)

September 10: The first Cuba-Malaysia Intergovernmental Mixed Commission concluded in Havana with the signing of agreements between both nations. Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Minister Marta Lomas signed the bilateral agreements for cooperation and trade. (Prensa Latina, 10/9/02)

September 10: The Cuban government donated 2, 000 liters of insecticides worth 50,000 yuan (6,041 US dollars) to China to help fight mosquitoes in its flood affected areas. Chinese Vice-Minister of Health Huang Jiefu and Cuban Ambassador to China Alberto Rodríguez Arufe attended the donation ceremony. (Xinhua, 10/9/02)

September 10: Honduran Health Minister Elías Lizardo expressed gratitude to the Cuban government and people for the Island's medical aid to fight dengue in his country. In a live broadcast, at the inauguration of a course for integral secondary teachers, Lizardo affirmed that Honduras has welcomed 301 "health teachers and ambassadors." (Prensa Latina, 10/9/02)

September 11: In an interview with CBC-TV, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said the unchecked greed of the West made it lose sight of the consequences of its actions 20 or 30 years into the future. "There is a moment when you have to stop, a moment when you are very powerful," he said. Chrétien said he made the same point once before to an audience of Wall Street magnates in New York who were complaining to him about Canada maintaining relations with Cuba. "I said: `When you're powerful like you are, you guys, this is the time to be nice.' That's one of the problems. You cannot exercise your power to the point of humiliation for the others," Chrétien said. "The Western world, not only the Americans, but the Western world has to realize because they are human beings, too", he added. (The Toronto Star, 12/9/02)

September 12: The Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA) and the Canadian subsidiary of the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) are working together on the

preservation of mountainous areas in the Guantánamo province which houses the richest biodiversity on the island. The program goes until 2004, and has provided material and technological support for schools and other institutions in the region, thus increasing the local population's awareness of environmental protection. (AIN, 12/9/02)

September 12: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque is in New York City to participate in the 57th UN General Assembly session. (Prensa Latina, 12/9/02)

September 13: A human smuggling network that for years would bring illegal immigrants from the Middle East into the U.S. via third countries was headed by an Indian citizen who is an Honorary Consul to Cuba, said federal US sources. Nathu Babu Dhamelia, a businessman in charge of Cuban consular affairs in the city of Ahmedabad, India, used his office to grant more than 1,500 illegal visas to people wishing to immigrate to the US. (El Nuevo Herald, 14/9/02)

September 13: The Mexican Foreign Secretariat said that their country's ambassador to Cuba, Ricardo Pascoe, who earlier was accused of embezzlement, had merely made some "administrative errors". Pascoe was called home for consultation to respond to the embezzlement charges leveled against him. After meeting with the ambassador, the Secretariat announced that the issue had been resolved and the charges filed against Pascoe this week would simply be resolved through a routine investigation. (EFE, 13/9/02)

September 13: Minister Igor Ivanov invited his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque to pay an official visit to Russia. A representative of Russian Foreign Ministry's Press and Information Department told the press that Igor Ivanov handed over the invitation during a meeting the two Ministers held on the sidelines of the 57-th session of the UN General Assembly. (Novosti, 15/9/02)

September 14: A Cuban medical brigade will leave for Nicaragua to support the emergency program against dengue in that country, announced Juan Amador, Public Health Ministry (MINSA) national epidemiology director. The Cuban doctors will also assist with preventive measures against West Nile Virus, Amador told the press. (Prensa Latina, 14/9/02)

September 14: Vietnamese National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Van An received and held talks with a visiting delegation of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) led by Yadira García Vera, a member of the Political Bureau. (BBC, 14/9/02)

September 14: Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Felipe Pérez Roque told the UN General Assembly that his country opposes a new military action against Iraq. Addressing world leaders gathering for the annual UN high-level debate, Roque said he made the statement not because his government is "driven by an anti-American spirit, even when the (US) government maintains and strengthens a 40-year-old blockade against our people." "It does so while recalling that at one point in time it supported the Security Council resolution asking the Iraqi government to end the occupation of Kuwait," he said. (Xinhua, 14/9/02)

September 16: It is reported that Canadian companies are suffering now that the United States has partially lifted its embargo on exports to Cuba. Until the restrictions were ended 18 months ago, Canada was the largest exporter to the country. Now, a flood of food and agricultural products is exported to Cuba from the United States. "It has had a big impact," said Mike Dungeate, president of the Ottawa-based Chicken Farmers of Canada. Canada had been the largest exporter to the socialist-run island of Fidel Castro, with food and agricultural products being second only in value to computers shipped from Canada. Total exports from Canada in 2001 were \$394-million, surpassing the \$332-million shipped in 2000. Since US food giants like Tyson have been allowed to export to Cuba, Canadian chicken shipments -- principally the dark

meat preferred in the Caribbean -- have dropped from 34.7 million kilograms to 10 million kilograms. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (Financial Post, 16/9/02)

September 16: The Cuban government held a cultural gala in honor of Mexico's independence day. Fidel Castro was there but not a single Mexican diplomat was in attendance. The celebration was held amid prickly relations between the two nations and a dispute between Mexico's foreign ministry and its envoy to Havana, Ambassador Ricardo Pascoe. "Nothing and no one could ever end our friendship," Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly, or parliament, said of the historic ties between the two countries. Our fraternal embrace reaches out to all Mexican men and women," Alarcón said during the event held at the Karl Marx Theater. (AP, 17/9/02)

September 16: Sixteen Cuban doctors in transit between South Africa and Cuba absconded and sought political asylum in Spain. Some of the doctors told colleagues and friends that life in Cuba was depressing and an exchange programme with South Africa had given them a means of escape. They did not like restrictions in their employment contracts, which appeared to be unchangeable. Since the programme started in 1994, many doctors from Cuba have fled from South Africa to neighbouring countries or have absconded en route to Cuba, mainly to Spanish-speaking countries. (The Sunday Independent, 22/9/02)

September 17: Four teams of defence attorneys and a former US Court of Appeals judge argued for overturning the guilty verdicts of Canadian James Sabzali and his US employers, convicted of conspiracy and multiple counts of violating the US Trading with the Enemy Act. Sabzali, a former Hamilton native, is the first Canadian found guilty of violating the US embargo against Cuba. He was convicted of conspiracy and 20 embargo violations, eight of them while resident in Canada. The case, widely considered a challenge to Canadian sovereignty, involved the sales of water purification supplies to Cuba. Ottawa filed two notes with the US State Department following the convictions. Washington has reportedly not responded to the notes. (Canadian Press, 17/9/02)

September 17: The complex outlook facing Latin America and the Caribbean regions -- worsened by the financial instability in various countries- is today's focus of debates of the 8th Latin-American and Caribbean Economists Association Congress. According to organizing committee sources of the event in Havana's Conference Center, more than 300 experts from 19 countries will analyze the current difficulties of the region as well as the ways to find a solution. (Prensa Latina, 17/9/02)

September 18: Cuban and Mexican parliamentarians begin a four day meeting in Havana to analyze relations between their respective legislatures and topics of interest to both nations. According to a note from the People's Power National Assembly Public Relations and Information Office (ANPP, Cuban Parliament), the 5th Cuba-Mexico Inter-parliamentary Meeting will be held at the National Hotel in Havana. Legislator Cecilia Romero, chairman of the Mexican Senate Foreign Relations Committee for Latin America, and Ramon Pez Ferro, ANPP International Relations Committee chair, lead the delegations. (Prensa Latina, 18/9/02)

September 18: A growing number of Cubans are claiming a "right to democracy," the US Ambassador to the Organization of American States said this week. Ambassador Roger F. Noriega called on Cuba to respect the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was celebrated at a summit to mark its first anniversary. "It is my fervent hope that the good people of Cuba are studying the Democratic Charter, because it represents a path to their reintegration into the Inter-American system," he said. Cuba, the only nation in the region without some form of democratic government, was suspended from the OAS in 1962. (The Washington Times, 18/9/02)

September 18: Mexico was "pleased" by the Cuban government's decision to ratify the Treaty of Tlatelolco, reported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE). In a communiqué, the Mexican Foreign

Ministry said that Mexico, in its capacity as depositary of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, welcomed the decision of the Cuban government. (Notimex, 18/9/02)

September 18: France praised Cuba's decision to accede to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) which was announced by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque at the 57th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). (Notimex, 18/9/02)

September 19: The 8th Latin American and Caribbean Economists Association Congress concluded with a wide program including speeches by 15 delegates and guests, some of them from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (Prensa Latina, 19/9/02)

September 20: Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham welcomed Cuba's announcement that it would accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The announcement was made to the United Nations General Assembly by Cuba's Minister of Foreign Relations, Felipe Perez Roque. "This is a significant step for Cuba and an important gesture in support of a multilateral, rules-based system governing disarmament and non-proliferation," said Mr. Graham. (Notimex, 20/9/02)

September 20: After five hours of discussion on human rights issues, behind closed doors, parliamentarians from Mexico and Cuba were unable to reach an agreement. The President of the National Assembly of the People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, "invited" the Mexican delegation, in particular the members of the National Action Party (PAN), to be consistent and to not keep playing into the hands of the United States. PAN's Senator Javier Corral replied that "we have never nor will we play into the hands of the Americans, we categorically deny such allegations which we cannot accept in any way". (Novedades Editores, 21/9/02)

September 22: Cuban Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC), Marta Lomas, arrived in Beijing for an official visit. (Prensa Latina, 22/9/02)

September 22: The Cuban Minister of Government, Ricardo Cabrisas, arrived in Brussels where he'll discuss Cuba's relations with the Group of 15 and will attend the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the ACP group (Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific). The ministers for financial cooperation and Cuba's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs will also meet European Union authorities to discuss Cuba's potential accession to the Cotonou Agreement. (EFE, Europa Press, 22/9/02)

September 23: Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Anatoly Zlenko began his second day of official visit to Cuba by placing a wreath on the monument to Cuban National Hero Jose Martí. Zlenko was then to meet his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque and attend the signing of agreements, after which he would hold a press conference at the Foreign Ministry in Havana. (Prensa Latina, 23/9/02)

September 23: Mexico is replacing its ambassador to Cuba. President Vicente Fox has asked Ambassador Ricardo Pascoe to step down on September 30, Mexico's Foreign Relations Ministry said in a statement. It did not give a reason for Pascoe's dismissal but said a successor would be named at the end of the month. (AP, 24/9/02)

September 23: Angola's minister of family and woman affairs, Mrs. Candida Celeste da Silva is leading a government multidisciplinary delegation to the international congress scheduled for September 22-27 in Havana. (Angola Press Agency, 24/9/02)

September 23: During a meeting with prominent leaders of the Cuban exile community in Miami, Czech President Vaclav Havel spoke from a telephone for the first time to the man he is championing for a Nobel Peace Prize. "I send my warmest embrace to you and the Czech

people," Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas told Havel. "Tell them that the Cuban people are already on the path to liberty." Havel replied with a promise of "my support, and that I hope that all your goals for the Varela Project come true." (The Miami Herald, 24/9/02)

September 23: The Cuban Minister of Government, Ricardo Cabrisas, met in Brussels with the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, with whom he discussed the upcoming negotiations between the Group of 15 and the ACP group of which Cuba is a member. (Prensa Latina, 23/9/02)

September 24: Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque confirmed that the European Union (EU) is opening an office for cooperation in Havana. During a press conference, Perez Roque noted that the dialogue between the EU and his country advanced during Belgium's presidency. (Prensa Latina, 25/9/02)

September 25: The Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Lafer, has concluded his three-day visit to Cuba, where he fulfilled an agenda that included interviews with Fidel Castro and Cuban ministers. During official talks at Havana's Foreign Affairs Ministry, Lafer reiterated his conviction that the meeting with his Cuban counterpart "will be a step forward to intensify ties between the two nations", especially in investment and technological cooperation. (Prensa Latina, 25/9/02)

September 25: Those who benefited and still benefit from the exploitation of Africa must humbly accept their historic debt to the Africans, Cuba's foreign affairs minister Felipe Pérez Roque has said. In a statement delivered at the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in New York endorsing the Africans' programme, Roque told world leaders that for NEPAD to succeed, Africa needed specific commitments and not rhetoric. (All Africa Global Media, 25/9/02)

September 25: Mexico's first lady invited her counterparts from the Americas to help look for ways to alleviate poverty. The 11th Conference of Spouses of Heads of State and Government was to open with 23 of the hemisphere's 35 first ladies. Cuba had planned to send Vilma Espin Guillois, wife of Fidel Castro's younger brother, Defense Minister Raul Castro. But at the last minute, she was replaced by Yolanda Ferrer, secretary general of the Federation of Cuban Woman (FMC). The change was not explained. (AP, 25/9/02)

September 26: The South African government welcomed a recent announcement by Cuba that it would accede to the treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. (SA, 26/9/02)

September 26: The 24th Inter American Public Relations Congress is in session in Varadero Beach, Cuba. Delegates from Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela and Spain lead debates. Public relations as a factor for national integration are a central topic of the debates. The event included more than 400 representatives from 16 countries. The Congress was convened by the Inter American Confederation of Public Relations (CONFIARP) and organized by the Cuban Association of Publicists and Publicity Workers (ACPP). (Prensa Latina, 26/9/02)

September 27: Ecuadorian Culture Minister Juan Manuel Valdano is in Cuba to analyze, with his counterpart, preparations for a regional culture ministers' meeting. Valdano explained that the integration topic will dominate the meeting, scheduled for the first week of November in Cuenca, Ecuador. (Prensa Latina, 27/9/02)

September 27: The European Union welcomed Cuba's decision to adhere to the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, urging countries not yet signed up to the international agreement to do so. (AFP, 27/9/02)

September 27: Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister Roy Chaderton arrived in Cuba, invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. During his four-day stay in the island, he will meet with the Cuban foreign minister and other top government officials and attend the inauguration of an inter-chancellery meeting. (Prensa Latina, 27/9/02)

September 30: The Mexican ambassador to Cuba who was removed from his post after being accused of misuse of funds blasted his government's increasingly unsympathetic policy toward Havana. Ricardo Pascoe commented in a letter to Mexican President Vicente Fox, a copy of which was made available to the press. Diplomatic relations between Mexico and Cuba are "on the verge of a de facto rupture," said Pascoe, lamenting the deterioration of the nations' ties. "For me, it has been a shock to experience first hand the change of direction Mexico has adopted regarding diplomatic relations between the two countries," said Pascoe. (EFE, 30/9/02)

Security

September 2: The Cuban official daily Granma questioned the US decision to move the Caribbean country from the Southern Command to the newly created Northern Command. The US decision to separate Cuba from the rest of Latin American countries and to include it in the new command showed that the United States still considers Cuba a threat, the daily said. The US Defense Department revamped its worldwide military command structure in April to help the military deal more effectively with unconventional threats from unpredictable sources such as the September 11 attacks. (Xinhua, 2/9/02)

September 11: Cuban customs authorities have prevented 30 drug-trafficking operations within its boundaries; however, they are still working to tighten controls on Cuban borders, said Jose R. Otaño Guevara, deputy-head of the General Customs of the Republic (AGR). Last year, according to the official, Cuban customs uncovered 29 cases of trafficking and 85 of consumption in Cuban airports, while they seized drugs amounted to 38 kilograms. So far this year, 21 cases of drug trafficking and 46 cases of drug consumption have been detected, while seized drugs total 47.27 kilograms – a significant increase. (World Data Service, 11/9/02)

September 13: Russia condemned as baseless a decision by the US State Department to impose sanctions on three Russian enterprises over alleged sales of military equipment to countries the United States says sponsor terrorism. The Russian Foreign Ministry protested the sanctions, imposed against the firms for a one-year period, stressing that international non-proliferation agreements had not been violated. The United States has not publicly specified which countries were involved, but Washington's list of states they say sponsor terrorism include Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya, Sudan and Syria. (UPI, 13/9/02)

September 14: Cuba announced that it would sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as a contribution to peace in the post-September 11 world. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said his country had not signed the treaty before because it allowed a club of nuclear powers to exist with no commitment to disarming. "As a sign of the clear political will of the Cuban government and its commitment to an effective process of disarmament that guarantees world peace, our country has decided to adhere to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty," he said. (Reuters, 14/9/02)

September 23: The sentencing of a senior Defense Intelligence Agency analyst who spied for Cuba for more than a decade has been postponed for several weeks. Federal prosecutors told US Judge Ricardo Urbina in a recent court filing that they need a little more time "to permit additional debriefing" of Ana Belen Montes, the highest-level US spy ever caught working for Cuba. Urbina agreed to delay scheduled sentencing of Montes until October 16. Montes, who federal agents are debriefing in a secret location in the Washington, D.C. area, was arrested a year ago at the Defense Intelligence Agency's headquarters. (The Miami Herald, 23/9/02)

September 25: It is reported that Canada spied on Cuba for the United States in the early 1960s, supplying the CIA with information on political and military developments in the Cold War hotspot, a new research paper reveals. Canadian diplomats began providing intelligence about the government of Fidel Castro at the direct request of Washington after the U.S. pulled out of Cuba and broke off diplomatic relations, says the paper by Don Munton, a professor in the international studies program at the University of Northern British Columbia. In his paper entitled, *Our Men in Havana: Washington and Canadian Intelligence on Castro's Cuba, 1959-1963*, Mr. Munton says Canada came under particular pressure to fulfil U.S. demands during the tense 1962 missile crisis. (The Ottawa Citizen, 25/9/02)

Terrorism

September 11: The Cuban newspaper Granma said that if the terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001 had not occurred, the US extreme right "would have invented them". The article signed by author Nidia Diaz, implied that were there reliable evidence, there would be no shortage of grounds to hold "American extreme right and the US hawks" responsible. (World Data Service, 11/9/02)

September 11: The US naval base in Guantánamo is keeping a climate of détente vis à vis the island, said Cuban military sources. In an encounter with foreign journalists visiting the area, Brigade-General José Solar, second in command of the Cuban Eastern Army, highlighted that the situation is "completely normal". "This situation has been consistent in the last eight months", added the high-ranking officer. Last year's September 11 attacks were unjustifiable, and so is Cuba's continued inclusion on the US State Department's terrorism watch list, Solar added. The attack on the World Trade Center's twin towers a year ago "has no justification," Brigade General José Solar told journalists. "It was a crime (...) more than 3,000 innocent people," said Solar. (World Data Service, 11/9/02)

September 12: Colombia's month-old government said it has been holding preliminary meetings in Cuba with the country's second-largest rebel army to explore the possibility of peace talks. "There have been exploratory meetings and we hope to continue with them to move much further toward a negotiated exit (to Colombia's 38-year-old conflict)," the government's chief peace negotiator Luis Carlos Restrepo told local radio by telephone from New York. When asked whether dialogue with the 5,000-member National Liberation Army had taken place in Cuba, the site of failed peace talks with the previous administration, Restrepo said: "Yes. There have been exploratory meetings." (Reuters, 12/9/02)

September 13: Cuba launched a web site to refute US charges that it sponsors terrorism and to seek support in the United States for the release of five Cubans imprisoned there for spying. Answering questions on the Web site, the head of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, said Cuba was cooperating with its longtime foe, the United States, on countering international terrorism since the September 11 attacks. "We are doing everything we can," he said, citing the opening of Cuban airspace to diverted air traffic the day of the attacks and accepting without protest the use of the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay as a detention camp for prisoners from Afghanistan. "We have made the proposal, and we stand by it, for bilateral cooperation in the struggle against terrorism," said Alarcon, President Fidel Castro's point man on relations with Washington. "We have presented other proposals through the diplomatic channel," he added, without giving details. So far, Washington had refused even to consider the Cuban proposals, he said. (Reuters, 13/9/02)

September 13: A top Cuban official accused Bush appointee Otto Reich of aiding an anti-Castro activist who had been accused in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner. Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly made the accusation during an online forum aimed at unveiling a Cuban anti-terrorism Web site. Reich, now head of the State Department's Bureau of

Western Hemisphere Affairs, has longtime and close ties to the "worst anti-Cuba terrorists," including suspected bomber Orlando Bosch, Alarcón said during the forum in Havana. The Cubans link Bosch to the October 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner traveling from Barbados to Jamaica. All 73 passengers were killed, including Cuba's 24-member Olympic fencing team. (The Dallas Morning News, 13/9/02)

September 16: Luis Posada Carriles, accused of trying to assassinate Fidel Castro will be tried in Panama in December for possessing explosives and falsifying documents, lawyers said. "The first hearing will take place on December 3," Rogelio Cruz, a lawyer for Posada Carriles, told the press. He said three others accused of involvement in the anti-Castro plot will be tried alongside Posada. Lawyers said there was no legal basis for extraditing Posada to Venezuela from Panama, a request being studied by Panama's foreign ministry. Posada is accused of plotting to blow up Castro during the Ibero-American Summit in Panama City in November 2000. He is also accused of using Venezuela as a base for his alleged involvement in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner over Barbados, which killed 73 people, and a 1997 campaign of explosions in tourist areas in Cuba. (Reuters, 16/9/02)

September 17: The State Department accused Cuba of deliberately subverting American efforts to fight terrorism by steadily providing Washington with erroneous tips and other false information about potential threats. The tips from Cuba, which began a year ago on the day of the September 11 attacks and have been arriving almost monthly, have led American investigators on "wild goose chases" and diverted important resources, said Dan Fisk, the deputy assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere. Fidel Castro and his government "are actually impeding our efforts to defeat the threat of terrorism," Mr. Fisk said, because prudence requires investigators to follow every lead. "This is not harmless game-playing," Mr. Fisk said. "It is a dangerous and unjustifiable action that damages our ability to assess real threats." Mr. Fisk's accusations came as hundreds of Cuban-Americans and others seeking to ease economic sanctions against Cuba converged in Washington for two days of meetings and lobbying, and supporters of sanctions sought to muster a publicity counteroffensive. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (The New York Times, 18/9/02)

September 18: Cuba's foreign minister angrily rebutted State Department charges that his government was providing the United States with false leads on terrorism, and he accused one American official of "lying with impudence." The minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, said that the government of Fidel Castro had repeatedly sought to cooperate with the United States since the September 11 attacks but that the Bush administration had rejected its overtures. (The New York Times, 18/9/02)

September 24: A guerrilla leader from Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN) said they "don't see the possibility of much progress" with the country's new president, Alvaro Uribe, but he confirmed the two sides had met in Cuba and plan to do so again before the end of the year. The ELN's Ramiro Vargas said from Havana that the first contacts took place on August 16 in an attempt to restart the peace process with the new Colombian administration. Vargas warned that it was "a first contact, without conditions," and even if they agreed to meet again, possibly at the end of the year, again in Cuba, "peace is not around the corner." (EFE, 24/9/02)

September 26: A soldier who guarded suspected terrorists at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has disappeared, US military officials said. Also US military officials announced that Army Major General Geoffrey D. Miller will assume control of the detention mission next month. Miller will replace General Rick Baccus, who was the second general in the post since detainees began arriving at the base in January. Army Staff Sergeant Ryan Foraker was last seen leaving his quarters at Camp America, near the Camp Delta prison where 598 detainees are held. Foraker's civilian shorts, T-shirt and wallet were found outside the fence of Camp America. (AP, 26/9/02)

US-Cuba Relations

September 4: Democratic candidate for Florida Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Dr. Andy Michaud, announced his position on expanding Agricultural Trade with Cuba. "Florida's agricultural products should be exempt from all embargoes and unilateral sanctions in regards to international trade with Cuba," said Dr. Andy Michaud (Democrat), USDA accredited veterinarian and candidate for Florida's Agriculture Commissioner. "Unilateral sanctions like the Cuban embargo do not work and often result in little or no change in foreign policy." "Clearly, Florida's farmers and our state economy would benefit tremendously by lifting the embargo and it will also prove to be a successful method of spreading democracy," continued Dr. Andy. "If we're selling timber to communist China, then we can sell beef and food to our neighbor, Cuba." (The Miami Herald, 4/9/02)

September 6: Fidel Castro has strongly criticized the stance of "unilateral hegemony" adopted by the US in the wake of the 11 September attacks. In a televised address, Castro decried the US intention of carrying out surprise attacks on countries seen as a threat to US security and described the possibility of launching an attack on Iraq as "madness", warning Cubans that "the international situation is so unstable that a situation could develop". (BBC, 8/9/02)

September 6: Officials from the Florida city of Pensacola said they wanted the Cuban government to use their port to ship food from the United States to the island. A delegation from Pensacola, which lies on northern Florida's Gulf Coast, met in Havana with foreign trade and port officials to make their pitch. (Reuters, 6/9/02)

September 6: The US Coastguard Service intercepted more than 50 Cuban migrants and detained at least 3 alleged smugglers after a terrible incident in which an individual traveling in one of the intercepted boats threatened to throw a small child in the sea. One of the boats, carrying about 25 Cuban migrants, was seen opposite the cays charging at one of the Coastguard patrol boats when the agents were trying to prevent them from reaching the shore, informed Lt. Cmdr. Jim Fitton, of the Key West Coast Guard Group. (El Nuevo Herald, 10/9/02)

September 6: Vicki Huddleston, America's top diplomat in Cuba, half-joked that she wouldn't be surprised if communist officials rolled out a red carpet leading to her departing plane later in the day. "Yes, I think that they are happy to see me go - but for all the wrong reasons," Huddleston told a news conference on her last day as US Interests Section chief. "I think I may have contributed in a small way to focusing attention on the human rights situation in Cuba", she said. Huddleston reiterated her belief that a transition in Cuba began when Fidel Castro fainted while giving a speech in the searing tropical sun, demonstrating his mortality for the first time. But Huddleston also said it would be a mistake for US officials to simply sit by idly waiting for "biological solution" - Castro's death - or the end of the US trade embargo. "Both of them have a determinate life span and perhaps they both are connected," said Huddleston. But until the inevitable occurs, she said, the American government must prepare for change by supporting human rights and backing Cuban-Americans who favor reconciliation. (AP, 6/9/02)

September 6: Assistant US Secretary of State Otto Reich criticized Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura and US business leaders for planning to attend an agribusiness exhibition in Havana. Reich said in an interview with Minnesota newspapers that Fidel Castro uses American politicians who visit the communist nation "as props." He also said he hoped Ventura and the business leaders wouldn't engage in "sexual tourism" calling it one of the main industries in Cuba. (AP, Minneapolis Star Tribune, 9/9/02)

September 9: Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura is asking for an apology from the Bush Administration over comments suggesting members of his planned Cuba trade mission might hire prostitutes. "I found Assistant Secretary Reich's comments offensive and at the very least, he and

President Bush owe my wife and children a personal apology," Ventura said. (AP, Minneapolis Star Tribune, 9/9/02)

September 13: The US Coast Guard has repatriated 55 Cuban migrants from two separate groups to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, and turned over three suspected smugglers to US Border Patrol. Cubans who reach US soil generally are allowed stay, but Cubans caught at sea usually are repatriated. (AP, 13/9/02)

September 14: Cuba warned the international community that a US attack on Iraq would deal a death blow to multilateralism and the United Nations itself. If Washington attacked Iraq, after "imposing it on the Security Council or deciding upon it unilaterally in opposition to international public opinion, we will bear witness to the emergence of the century of unilateralism and the forced retirement of the United Nations organization," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque told the UN General Assembly. (Reuters, 14/9/02)

September 14: Two weeks after a Miami-based liquor manufacturer gave the Florida Republican Party \$50 000, Florida Governor Jeb Bush wrote a letter to a political appointee of his brother, President Bush, asking the US Patent and Trademark Office to "take quick, decisive action" favoring the company in a trademark dispute. A year before that, on June 18, 2001, the company -- Bacardi-Martini USA -- gave the Florida GOP another \$25 000. The sequence of events has angered a Cuban-French joint venture that is fighting Bacardi over the brand name "Havana Club." Its lawyers filed a complaint charging that Jeb Bush's intervention amounted to an illegal "ex parte," or one-sided, attempt to politically influence a judicial proceeding before the federal Trademark Trial and Appeal Board. The governor's letter was sent to former representative James E. Rogan (Republican-California), whom the president appointed to head the Patent and Trademark Office. (The Washington Post, 14/9/02)

September 14: Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura told his radio listeners that he won't be used for propaganda by Fidel Castro when Ventura and a group of Minnesota executives visit Cuba. "I know what it's like to be under the rule of a dictator," said Ventura. The trip has been criticized by the US State Department and by Governor Jeb Bush of Florida. (AP, 14/9/02)

September 16: Nine Cubans have been held by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in Buffalo, New York. The group who defected during a Catholic conference in Toronto, crossed the border to the US. But even though the INS ruled that all nine had a reasonable fear of persecution if they were returned to Cuba, the agency denied them parole and has held them in an INS detention center and two county jails in New York -- some of which house violent criminals. Relatives in New Jersey, Florida and Michigan have hired a lawyer and written letters urging their release; so have US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and the bishop of Buffalo. Normally, Cuban refugees who arrive in South Florida are released on parole within 48 hours. But what's commonly referred to as the wet foot/dry foot policy in South Florida -- Cubans caught at sea are typically repatriated -- has little resonance in Buffalo. The nine cannot be deported to Cuba, but they could be returned to Canada, Winston Barrus, deputy district director said. (The Miami Herald, 16/9/02)

September 16: A poll finds clear support for continuing the long-term economic embargo against Cuba. President Bush has said he will not lift the embargo until the government of Fidel Castro regime honors human rights, releases political prisoners and holds free and fair elections. Fifty-six percent of those polled said they support continuing the embargo, while 27 percent said the embargo should be lifted regardless of whether the Castro regime allows democratic reforms. Seventeen percent of those polled said they were unsure. (CNSNews.Com, 16/9/02)

September 17: When the first US food and agribusiness trade fair opens in Havana, the state with the strongest pro-embargo lobby will have the largest number of exhibitors. Of the 266

companies slated to attend, 31 are headquartered in Florida, said John Kavulich, whose US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council monitors business between the two countries. The news signals a shift for Florida business. Until now, commerce has taken a back seat to politics, giving the Midwestern states initial strength in the Cuban market. (AP, 17/9/02)

September 17: A solid majority of Americans-over fifty percent-believe the US should lift restrictions on Americans' freedom to travel to Cuba, allow US-produced food and medical products to be sold to Cuba unimpeded and take steps toward normalization with Cuba as a matter of America's national interest. So found a new national survey, released at the National Summit on Cuba which is being held at Washington DC's National Press Club. The National Summit on Cuba is aimed at breaking myths about Cuban American and Republican support of the 40-year-old US embargo and the national consensus that a new approach to Cuba can better serve the US. (PR Newswire, 17/9/02)

September 17: Proponents of greater US trade with Cuba declared that momentum for easing economic sanctions against the Caribbean-island nation was on their side, but opponents of Fidel Castro charged Havana was impeding the US-led war on terrorism. The competing claims came as pro- and anti-trade factions in the debate over the US embargo on Cuba held seminars next door to each other, with rival speakers and contradictory opinion polls. Both sides planned to send supporters to Capitol Hill on Wednesday to lobby lawmakers. [For more on this, see section Terrorism.] (Reuters, 18/9/02)

September 17: It is reported that Bush administration officials agreed to begin examining transactions between the US and Cuba to make sure companies are not offering Cuba financing or taking other steps that violate US law. This means the administration is likely to ask US companies for what is typically private information about exports sent to Cuba, including price data and proof of payment. (The Washington Times, 17/9/02)

September 17: The University of Tennessee received permission from the federal government to play three exhibition baseball games in Cuba in December. The school's athletic department worked with US Representative Jimmy Duncan, Republican-Tennessee, to get a license from the US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control to travel to Cuba. USA Baseball helped schedule the games. (AP, 18/9/02)

September 18: Nearly two dozens Cuban musicians -- including one winner -- were forced to miss the Latin Grammy ceremonies in Hollywood because a new law targeting terrorists kept them from securing visas in time for the show. The performers don't exactly fit the typical threat profile. Among the 22 musicians blocked from the event was Chucho Valdes, one of Cuba's best-known jazz pianists, who won the award for Pop Instrumental Album. Also shut out were guitarist Rey Guerra, nominated for Pop Instrumental Album, and an up-and-coming rapper named X Alfonso, nominated for Best Rap/Hip-Hop album. An official at the State Department said that the Cuban performers were not denied visas but rather were required by a law, enacted in May, to clear a lengthy screening process that had not yet been completed. (The Washington Post, 19/9/02)

September 18: Efforts to pressure Congress on Cuba policy erupted in yelling and a scuffle among demonstrators in Capitol Hill, Washington, as debate over the long-standing trade embargo and travel ban to the communist island escalated. Anti-embargo demonstrators yelling "give me my right to travel," in Spanish were confronted by embargo supporters who want to keep the travel restrictions in place. Representatives Bill Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts), JoAnn Emerson (Republican-Montana), Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona) and James McGovern (Democrat-Massachusetts), who also want an end to the embargo and travel ban, told demonstrators the restrictions would be lifted before the year is out. A group of anti-Fidel Castro exiles disrupted the news conference, gathering across the street and shouting "Democracy for Cuba" and "Cuba Si, Castro No." Karl Rove, senior political advisor to president Bush, spoke at a

private meeting before more than 50 supporters of the 4-decade-old embargo and pledged that it will remain in effect. "Rove once again reiterated the administration's strong stand that the president will not waver on this," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Miami Republican who attended the morning meeting. (CNSNews, The Miami Herald, 18,19/9/02)

September 18: US Senator George Allen (Republican-Virginia), is coming out strongly against easing American trade restrictions on Cuba before dramatic reform and respect for human rights occur on that island nation. In remarks made to the group Americans for a Free Cuba, Allen said history has shown that trade with Cuba helps the Castro regime but has not improved the plight of the Cuban people. "There are those who are saying that we ought to change our trade policies with Cuba," Allen said. "There are those who blame the United States for the deplorable conditions in Cuba. The blame lies squarely on the repressive shoulders of Fidel Castro. Indeed, for many years other countries have been trading with Cuba, whether from Latin America, Europe or elsewhere, and what effect has that had? None." (UPI, 18/9/02)

September 18: Immigration officials set free nine Cuban refugees who had been held for more than a month in upstate New York, after a phone call and letters from prominent Miami Cuban-American Republicans to the White House and the US attorney general. The five women and four men were released to family members from New Jersey, Michigan and Florida. The group had been held in detention facilities in the Buffalo area after they defected in Canada and crossed the US border. The group defected after a Catholic conference in Toronto in July after Pope John Paul II's visit there, by taking cab rides across the Peace and Rainbow bridges at Niagara Falls and requesting asylum from Buffalo authorities. (The Miami Herald, 19/9/02)

September 20: Fidel Castro said that he is looking forward to the trade fair of American food products in Cuba, adding that his nation plans to keep buying agricultural products from United States companies. Presiding over the close of an economists' gathering, Castro told reporters he would attend the four-day fair. "We are happy they are coming," he said of the more than 200 American agricultural companies and organizations scheduled to participate. As for making more direct purchases of food from United States producers, "for a time it will be beneficial to do it," he said. (AP, 20/9/02)

September 20: For two days, a group of Cuban migrants was stranded on mangrove islands off the Upper Keys, Florida, surviving only on rainwater captured in cans that someone had tossed away. What the seven rafters didn't know was that they were in John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, only about a mile from the mainland. Rescuers -- alerted by passing fishermen -- found the migrants. One man had to be located by a Monroe County sheriff's helicopter after wandering off, probably in search of help. The men are expected to be taken to the Krome Avenue detention center in West Miami-Dade County where they will likely be released to friends or relatives. (The Miami Herald, 20/9/02)

September 24: Cuba tried to negotiate the purchase of sugar in the US market, said Pedro Alvarez, President of the Cuban company Alimport. "Why not buy sugar from the US at a good price when we would have to do it somewhere else anyway? However, Alvarez added, "we did not find good prices". (World Data Service, 24/9/02) September 24: It has been reported that the outgoing leader of the Republican majority in the Florida legislature, Jerry Maygarden, visited Cuba in a trade exchange mission sponsored by the Port of Pensacola. The visit concluded with a 6-hour long lunch with Fidel Castro. (El Nuevo Herald, 24/9/02)

September 26: Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura arrives in Cuba among a delegation of American food and agricultural business executives taking part in a four-day exposition of US food products in Havana. (VOANews, 26/9/02)

September 26: Led by Fidel Castro, Cuban government officials welcomed American executives to a US trade fair in Havana and encouraged them to assist in dismantling the trade embargo. Castro did not speak during the opening ceremony but nodded approvingly and clapped enthusiastically at Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura's call for closer relations. "How can we switch them to capitalism if we don't work with them?" the governor of Minnesota told the press at the fair. "Then the evolution could well take place, you don't know." The fact that the Cuban government is communist need not be an obstacle to closer trade relations, said Ventura. Castro strolled around the nearly 300 exhibits and sampled some of the wares. Some 700 executives with hopes of reclaiming the Cuban market are representing 288 companies from 33 states, putting attendance at the US Food and Agriculture Exhibition at twice what organizers expected. Florida businesses lead the pack with 32 exhibitors. (The Miami Herald, Sun Sentinel, CNN, 27/9/02)

September 26: Fidel Castro attended an artistic gala, part of the US Food & Agribusiness Exhibition. US business people and notables participating in the trade exhibition attended the performance. (Prensa Latina, 27/9/02)

September 26: Fidel Castro orchestrated a series of marathon private meetings with several delegations attending the United States Food and Agribusiness Exhibition in Havana, the first agricultural trade show between Cuba and the United States in 40 years. (The New York Times, 28/9/02)

September 28: Fidel Castro told hundreds of Americans at the Food and Agribusiness Exhibition that the event was expected to generate \$60 million in new contracts for US food sales to Cuba. Noting that Cuba has already spent \$140 million for US farm products in a little less than a year, Castro told guests gathered at a dinner for 700 people that the number would grow to \$200 million because of the trade show. (AP, 30/9/02)

September 28: Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura left Havana after a three-day visit to this island city, hoping his last international trip as Minnesota's salesman to the world would help push the United States and Cuba closer together. (Minnesota Pioneer Press, 29/9/02)

September 29: Cuba's top food importer scoffed at charges he was in cahoots with US companies to get around a cash-only requirement for food purchases, stating foreign banks were providing some of the money. "There have been some financial operations with third party banks," Alimport Chairman Pedro Alvarez told the press. "We are following the law exactly." Pro-embargo lawmakers in Washington are demanding an investigation into the sales, which amount to \$140 million since December, charging US firms are somehow skirting the law. Cuba has contracted for millions more food products than initially expected at the US agriculture trade show, Alvarez said. "We have agreed to \$66 million so far and we are not finished yet," he said. (Reuters, 29/9/02)

September 30: New US food sales to communist Cuba reached nearly \$90 million at the agribusiness fair, Cuban officials said. As the fair neared the end of its last day, Cuban officials said they had signed contracts for about \$89 million in US farm products - almost double what they initially hoped for. Deals for as much as \$13 million more in sales were still being discussed and would be announced in the coming days, said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import concern Alimport. "The embargo has been weakening," Fidel Castro said after signing one of the largest contracts of the fair, a \$17.1-million deal with agribusiness giant Cargill Inc. of Minneapolis. Cuban officials hope the US food fair and resulting sales will lead to more trade with the United States and a further weakening of the American trade embargo against the island. (Canadian Press, 30/9/02)

September 30: The 40 year-old US economic blockade on Cuba is weakening, but won't be lifted overnight, Fidel Castro told the press after witnessing the signing of several agreements between Cuban and US companies. He pointed out that Washington's sanctions on Havana have been weakening and continue to show their uselessness. The contracts were signed at the closing day of the US Food & Agribusiness Fair. Fidel Castro attended the signing of contracts between Cuba and Homedale Farms (Kaehler, Minnesota) for \$75,000 and US food giant Cargill for \$17.1 million. (Prensa Latina, 1/10/02)

September 30: The US Democratic Party hailed Cuba's most prominent democracy activist as a standard-bearer of freedom whose "small fire" of protest burns brightly on the island. In a ceremony and dinner, the National Democratic Institute honored Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya and the Varela Project -- which has petitioned the communist regime of Fidel Castro for greater openness -- with its 15th annual Democracy Award. President Bush wrote a letter commending the Cuban activist that was read aloud. "Your life has been marked by a long tradition and dedication to bringing freedom and democracy to Cuba," the Bush letter said. "The important movement you have inspired has justly earned you the respect of democratic peoples around the world." Payá was not present for the event attended by 700. The Cuban government declined him permission to travel. (The Miami Herald, 1/10/02)

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